

The 2010 Census: Count Question Resolution Program

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Introduction

With the completion of most 2010 decennial census operations, as census data products continue to be disseminated, officials of some jurisdictions and the Members who represent these jurisdictions in Congress may have questions about the accuracy of the census counts for their areas. Because census data are the basis for distributing more than \$450 billion a year in federal program funds to states and localities,¹ local officials, especially, could want any errors in these data corrected. The Bureau of the Census's 2010 Count Question Resolution (CQR) Program provides a means for local officials to challenge certain census figures on the basis of detailed mapping evidence that they present to the Census Bureau.

A May 26, 2010, *Federal Register* notice announced the Bureau's proposal for the 2010 CQR Program.² The final notice of the program was issued on March 8, 2011.³

On June 1, 2011, the Bureau began accepting CQR challenges to the 2010 census counts. The Bureau will accept challenges only from official representatives of state, local, or tribal area governments; will review challenges in the order it receives them; will not collect any new data to resolve CQR challenges; will not revise any 2010 census data products; and will not consider challenges received after June 1, 2013, the date the program ends.⁴

As of November 29, 2012, jurisdictions in 33 states, plus the District of Columbia, had filed a total of 180 CQR challenges to the 2010 census counts.⁵ After the 2000 census, the Bureau received CQR challenges from 1,180 jurisdictions out of about 39,000 nationwide. Corrections resulting from these challenges added about 2,700 people to the 281.4 million enumerated in 2000.⁶

This report discusses what 2010 CQR challenges the Bureau will consider, the documentation necessary for preparing and submitting a challenge, what modifications the Bureau will make if a challenge is successful, and specific changes it will not make.

Types of Challenges the Bureau Will Consider

The Bureau will consider only three types of challenges: boundary, geocoding, and coverage, each of which is explained below.

- Boundary challenges concern the allegedly “inaccurate reporting or the inaccurate recording of boundaries legally in effect on January 1, 2010.”⁷

¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Why It’s Important—2010 Census,” at <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/about/why-important.php>.

² U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, “The 2010 Census Count Question Resolution Program,” proposed collection; comment request, *Federal Register*, vol. 75, no. 101, May 26, 2010, pp. 29508-29513.

³ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, “The 2010 Census Count Question Resolution Program,” notice of program, *Federal Register*, vol. 76, no. 45, March 8, 2011, pp. 12694-12700.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 12694-12695.

⁵ For the list of these jurisdictions, see U.S. Bureau of the Census, “2010 Census Count Question Resolution, Challenging Jurisdictions as of 11/29/12,” at http://2010.census.gov/2010census/pdf/cqr_gu_status_rpt_11-29-12.pdf. A jurisdiction on the list may be designated a “borough,” “city,” “county,” “town,” “township,” or “village.” In one instance, a state (Massachusetts) filed a challenge. *Ibid.*

⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Count Question Resolution,” at <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/about/cqr.php>.

⁷ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, “The 2010 Census Count Question Resolution Program,”

- Geocoding challenges “identify suspected errors in the geographic location of living quarter addresses within the governmental unit boundaries and census tabulation blocks.”⁸
- Coverage challenges that are upheld by the Bureau will “result in the addition or deletion of specific living quarters and persons associated with them identified during the census process, but ... erroneously included as duplicates or excluded due to processing errors.”⁹

Required Documentation

The Bureau will research only challenges that it considers to be well documented. The documentation must state, first, whether the dispute is about jurisdictional boundary locations, the number of housing units or group quarters¹⁰ in one or more census tabulation blocks, or both boundaries and numbers. Then, the documentation must present information appropriate for the type or types of challenge.¹¹

- Boundary challenges: The documentation must show the correct map location of each disputed governmental unit boundary and specify where the Bureau showed the boundary to be. All disputed boundaries must have been legally in effect as of January 1, 2010.

Further, the documentation must list the addresses in disputed 2010 census tabulation blocks and show their locations relative to the boundary or boundaries in question.¹²

- Geocoding and coverage challenges: The documentation must identify each disputed 2010 census tabulation block and list the addresses of all housing units or group quarters in that block as of April 1, 2010 (Census Day).¹³

The Bureau has posted on its CQR website¹⁴ a document with guidelines for preparing and submitting 2010 CQR challenges,¹⁵ including links to the maps the Bureau will accept for

notice of program, *Federal Register*, vol. 76, no. 45, March 8, 2011, p. 12696.

⁸ Ibid. According to the Bureau, a “census tabulation block” is a “geographic area bounded by visible features, such as streets, roads, streams, and railroad trac[k]s, and by nonvisible boundaries, such as city, town, township, and county limits, and short line-of-sight extensions of streets and roads.” A census block generally covers a small area, “for example, a block in a city bounded on all sides by streets.” Census blocks in suburban and rural areas, however, “may be large, irregular, and bounded by a variety of features” and in remote areas “may encompass hundreds of square miles.” Census blocks are “the smallest geographic entities for which the ... Bureau tabulates decennial census information.” Ibid., p. 12698.

⁹ Ibid., p. 12696.

¹⁰ Living quarters consist of housing units (houses, apartments, mobile homes, etc.) and group quarters. The Bureau defines a “group quarters” facility as “a place where people live or stay, in a group-living arrangement that is owned or managed by a governmental unit or organization providing housing and services for the residents.” Examples of institutional group quarters are nursing homes, mental hospitals, inpatient hospices, correctional facilities, and residential schools for the disabled. Group quarters also may be noninstitutional, including college or university dormitories, military barracks, group homes, shelters, convents, migratory farm worker camps, military ships, and maritime vessels. Ibid., p. 12698.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 12697.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Count Question Resolution,” at <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/about/cqr.php>.

¹⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Guidelines for Stateside Count Question Resolution (CQR) Challenges* (Washington:

challenges and instructions about how to annotate the maps before submitting challenges.¹⁶ To be acceptable, a map must identify the state, county, 2010 census tract or tracts,¹⁷ and 2010 census tabulation blocks “associated with” a challenge. For a challenge involving “an American Indian Reservation or off-reservation trust land,” the map “must identify the American Indian area, census tribal tract, and 2010 census tabulation block boundary.”¹⁸ Examples of acceptable maps are

- 2010 census P.L. 94-171 county block maps, created in connection with 2010 redistricting data;¹⁹ and
- 2010 census P.L. 94-171 TIGER/Line shapefile-derived maps, small- or large-format maps generated using the 2010 TIGER/Line shapefiles as a base for 2010 census tracts, blocks, and other boundaries.²⁰

The CQR website also provides links to address list templates for CQR challenges.²¹

Changes the Bureau Will Make If a Challenge Succeeds

If the Bureau upholds a governmental unit’s challenge, it will issue corrected 2010 population, housing unit, and group quarters counts to the jurisdiction. These corrections will constitute new official 2010 counts, which the governmental unit may use for programs that require such data.²²

undated), at http://2010.census.gov/2010census/pdf/cqr_submission_guidelines_final_rev8-1-11.pdf.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 10. See pp. 11-15 for further discussion of these maps. See also U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Census Bureau Map Products,” “2010 Census Reference,” at http://www.census.gov/geo/www/maps/CP_MapProducts.htm.

¹⁷ Like a census block, a census tract is a key element of the Bureau’s geography. In its terminology, a “census tract” is a “[s]mall, relatively permanent statistical subdivisio[n] of a county or equivalent entity updated by local participants prior to each decennial census as part of the ... Bureau’s Participant Statistical Areas Program in accordance with ... Bureau guidelines.” The population size of census tracts generally ranges from 1,200 to 8,000 people; the “optimum size” is 4,000 people. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, “The 2010 Census Count Question Resolution Program,” notice of program, *Federal Register*, vol. 76, no. 45, March 8, 2011, p. 12698.

¹⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Guidelines for Stateside Count Question Resolution (CQR) Challenges* (Washington: undated), p. 10, at http://2010.census.gov/2010census/pdf/cqr_submission_guidelines_final_rev8-1-11.pdf.

¹⁹ See U.S. Bureau of the Census, “P.L. 94-171 County Block Maps—2010 Census,” at http://www.census.gov/geo/www/maps/pl10_map_suite/cou_block.html.

The Bureau notes that the 2010 census data “allow state officials to realign congressional and state legislative districts ... taking into account population shifts since the last census and assuring equal representation for their constituents in compliance with the ‘one-person, one-vote’ principle of the 1965 Voting Rights Act,” P.L. 94-171; 13 U.S.C. 141. “The 2010 Census Redistricting Data (P.L. 94-171) Summary File contains the data used for this redistricting.” U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Accessing the 2010 Census Redistricting Data (P.L. 94-171) Summary File,” at http://factfinder2.census.gov/legacy/accessing_pl.html#transcript_text.

²⁰ See U.S. Bureau of the Census, “2010 Census TIGER/Line Shapefiles,” at <http://www.census.gov/geo/www/tiger/tgrshp2010/tgrshp2010.html>.

The Bureau maintains a Master Address File and Topologically Integrated Geographic Encoding and Referencing database (MAF/TIGER) that is essential for its census and survey operations, such as mailing out census questionnaires and following up with nonrespondents. Of the file types that the Bureau offers for mapping census geographic data, the TIGER/Line shapefiles are the “most comprehensive ... including boundaries, roads, address information, water features, and more.” U.S. Bureau of the Census, “TIGER Products,” at <http://www.census.gov/geo/www/tiger/>.

²¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Count Question Resolution,” at <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/about/cqr.php>.

²² U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, “The 2010 Census Count Question Resolution Program,” notice of program, *Federal Register*, vol. 76, no. 45, March 8, 2011, p. 12696.

The Bureau will incorporate all CQR corrections into the 2010 census file used to make annual postcensal estimates, beginning with those issued in December 2012.²³ Postcensal estimates have various important uses, including as benchmarks for many federally funded survey totals; in certain formulas for allocating federal program funds to states and localities; and as indicators of changing U.S. population size, composition, and characteristics.²⁴

The Bureau also will make available, on its American FactFinder website,²⁵ an inventory of CQR corrections to the 2010 census counts.²⁶ The corrections will appear as well in a document posted on the CQR website.²⁷

Changes the Bureau Will Not Make

Even though a state, local, or tribal area government may be able to document that the 2010 census missed housing units or group quarters in existence as of April 1, 2010, the Bureau will not issue revised counts for the jurisdiction if CQR research and census records demonstrate that all the Bureau's "boundary information, geocoding, and coverage processing were correctly implemented."²⁸ In such an instance, the official representative of the governmental unit will receive a letter from the Bureau, stating that it will retain the jurisdiction's documentation "for consideration" during future "address list updating."²⁹

In 2010, the apportionment population³⁰ included counts of U.S. military personnel stationed abroad, federal civilian employees assigned abroad, and the dependents of these two groups who were living with them. The Bureau will not uphold challenges to these counts.³¹

More generally, the Bureau will not issue corrections to the 2010 population counts for housing units or group quarters, or to the inventory of population and housing characteristics. It will not revise the 2010 apportionment data, the 2010 data for within-state redistricting, or other data products from the 2010 census.³²

²³ The Bureau defines "postcensal" estimates as those for the years that follow the most recent decennial census. Using data from birth and death records, Medicare enrollment records, federal tax returns, immigration records, and housing unit information, the Bureau constructs these estimates to update the census counts until the next census. *Ibid.*, p. 12699.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ The Bureau's American FactFinder website provides access to data from the 2000 and 2010 censuses, the American Community Survey, the population estimates program, the quinquennial economic censuses, and annual economic surveys. See U.S. Bureau of the Census, "American FactFinder," at <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>.

²⁶ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "The 2010 Census Count Question Resolution Program," notice of program, *Federal Register*, vol. 76, no. 45, March 8, 2011, p. 12696.

²⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *2010 Census of Population and Housing, Notes and Errata* (Washington: June 2011), at <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/notes/errata.pdf>.

²⁸ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "The 2010 Census Count Question Resolution Program," notice of program, *Federal Register*, vol. 76, no. 45, March 8, 2011, p. 12696.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ The U.S. Constitution—Article 1, §2, clause 3, as modified by §2 of the Fourteenth Amendment—requires a population census every 10 years, to serve as the basis for apportioning seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.

³¹ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "The 2010 Census Count Question Resolution Program," notice of program, *Federal Register*, vol. 76, no. 45, March 8, 2011, p. 12695. The Bureau explained that it obtained the counts of the U.S. military and federal civilians abroad from administrative records, which "do not provide the sub-State geographic information required for the CQR Program." The counts were included solely for use in determining the apportionment population. *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, p. 12696.

Conclusion

The CQR Program provides a means, but a strictly limited means, for local officials to contest and seek a revision of the 2010 census counts for their governmental units. Challenges to these counts must present detailed mapping evidence in support of alleged boundary, geocoding, or coverage errors. The Census Bureau will neither collect any new data to resolve CQR challenges, nor make retroactive changes to data products generated from the 2010 census, including the apportionment numbers and the data for within-state redistricting. If the Bureau upholds a jurisdiction's challenge, however, it will provide revised 2010 population, housing unit, and group quarters counts to the jurisdiction for its use going forward, in programs that require 2010 data. Again with respect to the future, the Bureau will incorporate all CQR corrections into the 2010 census file on which annual postcensal estimates will be based. Particularly since postcensal estimates, together with other census data, are used to distribute more than \$450 billion a year in federal program funds to states and localities, local officials could seek the greatest possible accuracy for program data.

A further observation about the CQR Program is that, in order to prepare and submit a challenge acceptable to the Bureau for review, a jurisdiction's local officials or employees must have the necessary expertise to read and annotate very detailed census maps. Governmental units lacking officials or staff with such expertise could be disadvantaged in the CQR process.

The outcome of the 2000 census CQR Program, in which 1,180 out of about 39,000 U.S. jurisdictions submitted challenges and the Bureau added about 2,700 people to the 2000 count of 281.4 million, could suggest that challenges are rather rare and the CQR results modest.

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